

WATERLOO --- The German prisoners of war Anson White watched over had their own cast of characters.

There was the SS officer who talked little, but was great at decorating a cake. And the little guy, Rudy, who ribbed White.

"He always said he was going to come back to the States and steal my wife," White said.

White served at Camp Patrick Henry in Newport News, Va., during World War II overseeing the POWs. His stories were preserved for posterity Wednesday during an taped interview with Congressman Bruce Braley, D-Waterloo, at the Sullivan Brothers Iowa Veterans Museum.

The interview is part of an ongoing effort by Braley to preserve the stories from veterans. It will be stored at both the Grout Museum District and at the Library of Congress in Washington as part of the Veterans History Project.

"Time is running out to capture their stories," Braley said.

White said this was the first time he had someone record his stories from his three years in the service. He talked about serving in North Africa in the U.S. Army, where he celebrated Christmas in the desert with a canteen of beer and oranges.

In 1946 White got word he was going home.

"The quicker the better," he said.

Braley said he's conducted more than 10 interviews with veterans ranging from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom. He said he got interested in talking to veterans because his father, also a World War II veteran who served at Iwo Jima, died before Braley was able to talk to him about the experience.

He encouraged other people to sit down and record an interview as well.

Braley said the interviews have also influenced him on policy decisions. Among those are the Veterans Access to Care Act, which expanded access to health care for the Veterans Administration, and the Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act, which helped develop treatment programs for post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans.

The Grout Museum District is also conducting its own interviews. It recently surpassed 1,000 recordings, museum officials said.